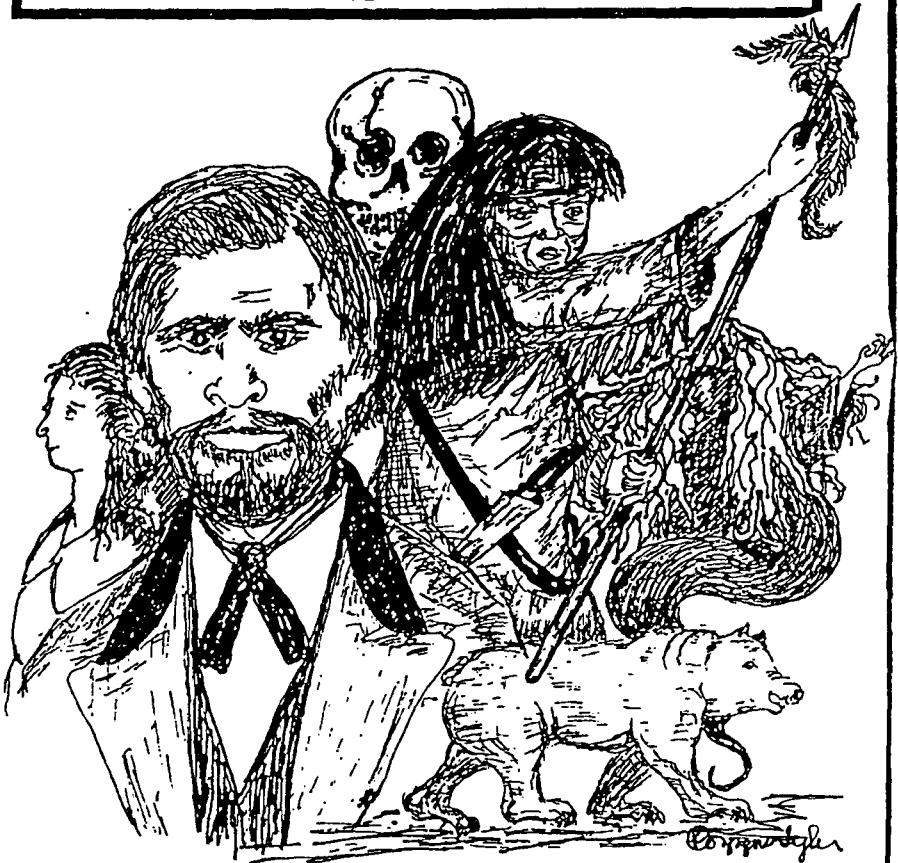


# Whoppers and Ghostly Tales from Rancho Santa Teresa



A collection of modern and old San Jose neighborhood oral history tales rewritten for children's enjoyment.

Written by:  
Michael Boulland

Drawings by:  
Katy Cozzens-Tyler

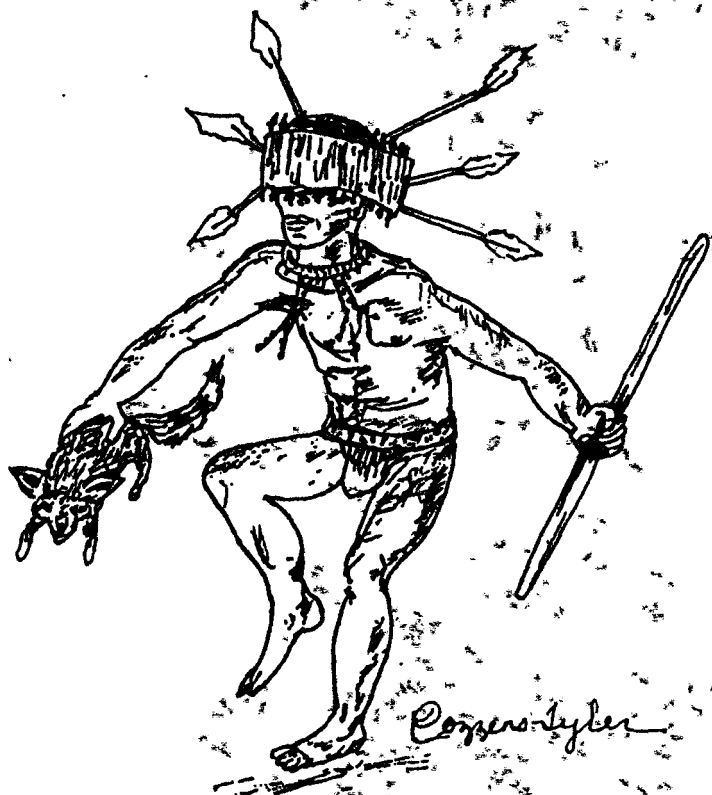
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First Edition

The story of the past  
is hidden all  
around us in the  
world of the present.

Author unknown

Erin and Sarah,  
May the spirit of  
Santa Teresa and spirit of  
life always protect you.  
Enjoy,  
M. Boulland  
10-3-98



# Introduction

Archaeologists estimate Indian life at Santa Teresa Springs to date back to 1000 BC. Later in history, Jose Joaquin Bernal, in 1823, developed his Rancho next to a spring and stories unfolded. In this book I will be sharing with you several colorful tales that survived the waggle of the neighbors' tongues and the embellishment of storytellers.

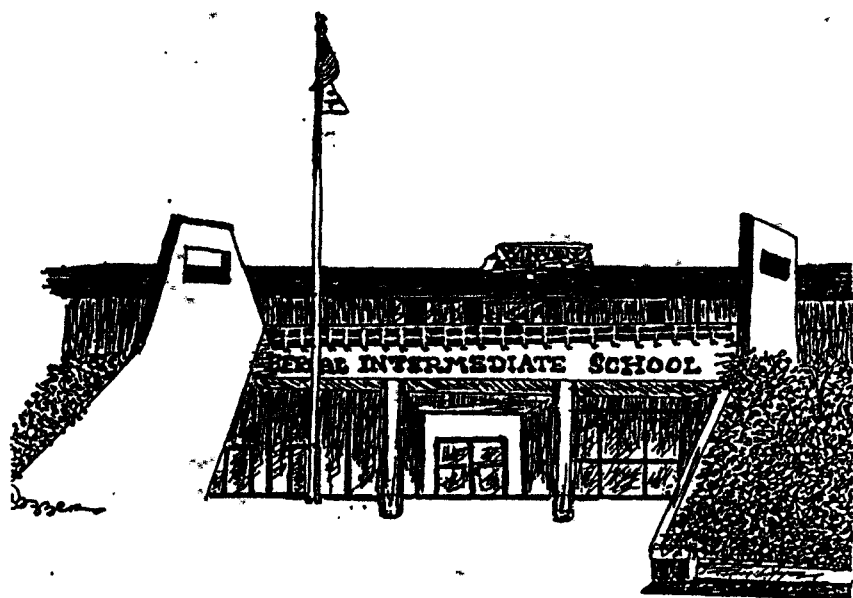
Today, Santa Teresa Springs and the Rancho area serve as a focal point for many local legends. Stories from the spring's area tell about animals, Indians, Mexicans, super heroes, treasure, thieves, miracles, ghosts and love. History of life at the springs will always continue as the oral tall tales record the memories of the past for the next generation to share.

At Santa Teresa Springs today, stories blend ancient oral tales into today's modern legends. Each of the stories you read will tell you about the "presence" of a Spirit found at many of the old Bernal Rancho properties. All the stories share the same facts about individuals feeling a "spiritual presence" on their properties. The stories are based on true experiences that are unexplained by modern logic and understanding. These experience stories continue to repeat themselves at different times but without the communication from one group to another.

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# The Spirit of Bernal Intermediate School





The "presence" of a modern day spirit may haunt the upper story of Bernal Intermediate School. The school is located at 8610 San Ignacio Avenue in South San Jose. It is built across the street from the original Bernal adobe. Bernal School's outer playground boundaries touch an ancient Indian Ohlone mound where the ancestors of the Muwekma Ohlone Indians held their sacred burial ceremonies for thousands of years.

This 2,000-year-old prehistoric burial ground includes twenty or more recorded Indian graves. A San Jose Mercury newspaper article in 1973 reported that the Oak Grove School District had to obtain a clearance from the City of San Jose to build the new Bernal school. The City wanted any remains of prehistory people to be removed from the site before any building permits were issued. The school district wanted its school to be built in an area away from any ancient burial grounds.

Caution had to be taken in this case because years earlier the ground was disturbed by P.G.& E.'s digging crews. They were laying new gas and electrical lines for the new housing being built in the area and the workers uncovered a human grave site that leads to exposing a good-sized ancient Indian village. The utility company called a team of archaeologists from the local state college to investigate and study the area. These scholars uncovered and reburied many graves. The study

came to an end when the area was mostly cleared of human remains.

In 1989, as a teacher in the Oak Grove School District, I was given an assignment as the soccer coach at Bernal Junior Intermediate School. I worked and taught with a friend, Ron Harris, the P.E. Department chairperson at the school.

After a coach's meeting late one day, he told me the story of "The Ghost of Bernal School!".



*"Many years ago, there was a custodian, named Roberto Ruiz, who worked the night shift here at the school. Roberto's custodial room was upstairs in the electrical switch room near the elevator. He also kept supplies in the janitor's closet downstairs close to the boy's locker room and the gym. Roberto would always try to talk to me when I entered the building early in the morning:*

*"Roberto would catch me as soon as he got to work," said Harris. "He would reveal to me that a spirit would appear in the upper sections of the building during his night shift."*

The custodian described the spirit to Harris as a figure with a large wart on the end of its nose. To make his point the custodian, a talented artist, would draw the spirit image he saw from his evening shift. He accurately drew in all the details from what he had seen and experienced during his night shift. He made many detailed sketches and drawings of the spirit, which always showed a large wart on the end of the spirit's nose.

The ghost story is confirmed by two of Bernal's former vice principals. In fact, Gary Francis, a previous principal at Bernal, has somewhere in his records Roberto's original sketches of the ghost. The four individuals tell similar stories about Roberto's events. All remember the custodian and his fears of the spirit. They each enjoy retelling the entertaining tale humorously. Mr. Francis said that both he and Ron Harris relished the story and loved to embellish it.

It was from the former vice-principal, Manny Barbara, that I obtained more information about the tale. Mr. Barbara holds a degree in psychology and has had his own private practice. He had been a psychologist with the Oak Grove School District for 8 years before spending 12 years as an administrator. He has had contact with many people and studied the workings of the human mind.

*Manny Barbara said, "I remember when Roberto worked for us. He acted strangely when asked to do any assignments in the upstairs sections of the building. I would have to remind Roberto to do his work on the upper floor at night."*



*He would always try to make excuses for not doing the work upstairs at night. I did not think he was goofing off, but now as I recall, I can remember times when his face showed definite signs of fear. He made the excuses because he felt the "presence" of the Bernal spirit and he avoided going upstairs. Roberto could not explain it, but I do remember how strongly Roberto felt about the "presence" of a spirit at the school.*

Ron Harris, Manny Barbara, and Gary Francis all tell of the posters Roberto had in his custodial room. Pictures of the "Ghost from Bernal" covered the closet walls. He had many drawings of what he saw. The walls were decorated with pictures of aliens from outer space that he had drawn, and World War II photographs and symbols.

Ron Harris said, "You should have seen his closet. All the sketches and pictures were pinned all over the walls. It was as if he was preparing for 'spirits' to come down at any time and take him away."

Manny Barbara describes the building at night. He stated that when he had to stay after to close up the building following night meetings or school dances, the building was eerie. The building is constructed in a manner that the night lights and the darkness played tricks on your eyes. Barbara said he "could understand how individuals could perhaps mistake shadows for spirits."



# The Elevator





Working and teaching around Bernal Intermediate school during the 1992-93 school term, I met many colorful and creative friends. Often I would try to strike up a conversation to verify the Bernal Ghost story with the teachers and other professionals I met at the school site. During my conversations, I would ask if anyone had strange experiences working around the building. Some people I met would laugh. On the other hand, others would seriously reply, telling me of their strange experiences.

I have spoken to former principals, vice-principals, assistant superintendents, teachers, custodians and other professionals. Many have known or worked with Roberto, and they knew of his story and loved to add something to his colorful tale.

One former vice-principal allowed me to make a video tape of him reenacting his experiences with the previous custodian, Roberto. He enjoyed acting out Roberto's version of the ghost story. He wanted to give the students a correct perspective and accurate description of the colorful person and his stories.

The previous principal, Gary Francis, helped in my research of this story by trying to find the ghost drawings he had saved that Roberto had given him. He looked in his files for the old drawings but could not find them. But it was the current night custodian,

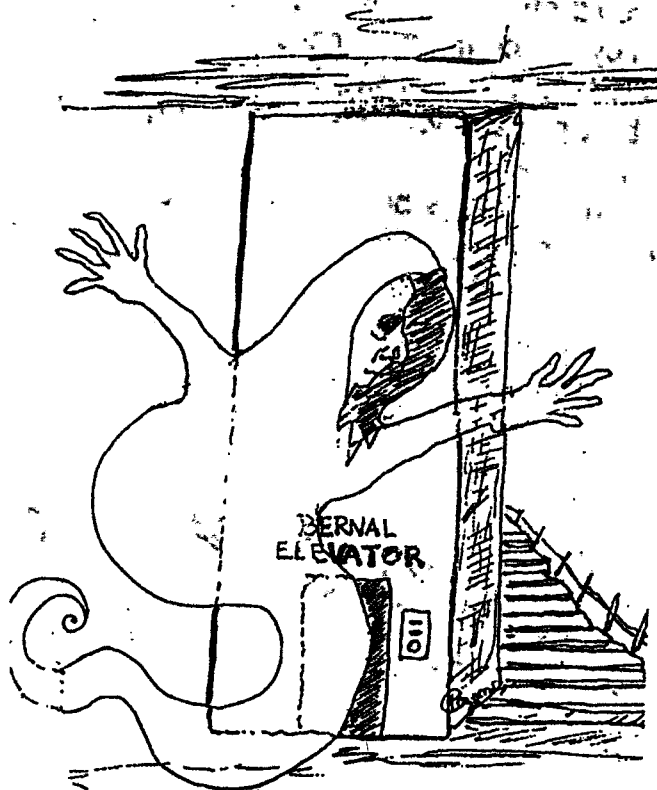
Marcos Zamarripa, who had a different story. He added a mysterious twist to the strange events about which the old custodian was trying to warn us.

Marcos told me he had not seen any images of a spirit in the building, but he did not like the elevator. It seemed the elevator acted strangely; it operated by itself.

As the custodian explained, when he was cleaning and working late at night, strange things would happen with the elevator. Marcos said he would be listening to the hum of his vacuum while he cleaned. He knew the only noise in the building was from the vacuum. He knew the timer to operate the building was set to shut down everything electrical for the night. Around 4:15 p.m. and again at 6:00 p.m. he made his rounds to lock all the outside doors and to check the classrooms for anyone who may have returned to the building. Therefore, from his rounds, he knew all the teachers had gone home; no one was working late. The building was quiet and empty except for him.

With all the doors to the building locked he would be scared and jump when he heard the loud banging sound of the elevator motors starting. The elevator noise would travel throughout the building as the elevator would begin to operate by itself.

The custodian heard the motors humming and observed the passenger compartment traveling up one story. He explained to me in the interview that this was strange because there was no logical reason why the elevator should begin to operate. No one had pushed any buttons; no one was around. Also, he said there was no automatic time clock or master control to allow the elevator to operate by itself.



Now one might not be alarmed about an elevator traveling up one floor as a normal occurrence. Yes, elevators are engineered to travel up and down floors. The startling fact about this event is the elevator and its safety design. The custodian explained one must have a special key to start the elevator's operation. The doors will not open unless a special key is used. It is set up this way so the intermediate students do not abuse it.

He explained that anyone who wished use of the elevator could operate it, but must be authorized to have the key, which must be checked out at the office. During that time of the night, Marcos knew he was the only one that had a key. He said that in the middle of the night it nearly scared him to death when the motors to the elevators began to operate for no apparent reason.



*elevator  
key*

He remembered these occurrences accurately because he then had to stop what he was doing to recheck all the doors for security reasons and to see who was in the building. He sounded annoyed because this put him off his schedule.

He said in 1992 that the maintenance people had been trying to fix the problem for several years, but the elevator continued to operate by itself. The last time it occurred was about six months before, in the fall of 1991. Again he said he had not seen anyone enter the building or the elevator when it operated by itself.

I have checked with the Oak Grove School District's electrician and the Maintenance Operations Department for the elevator repair records. The school district maintenance records do not show any repairs made on the elevator to correct this problem.

I know that Marcos did not know the story about Roberto's experience with a ghost. When I asked him, he said he did not work at Bernal during that time and did not know Roberto. Also, he said no one had previously told him the story about the ghost haunting Bernal School.

The custodial closet was located down the hallway, not near the elevator. When I asked a former Vice-Principal to make a video tape about his interactions with Roberto, he recalled Roberto saying that the ghost's image occurred over by the elevator. The new custodian, Marcos, recalled the elevator worked by itself. I find it very bizarre that all the stories tell of strange events happening around the elevator!

One always needs to be concerned about authentication of the stories people tell. It is very important to me to have my information recorded precisely. Helping me verify the information, I often use a video-tape to record the interviews.

In this case, the custodian was very willing to put his original story on video tape. He spoke in front of several intermediate students, telling what happened to him regarding the elevator. The video clips show the custodian was very serious in telling us about his experience. He wanted to find out if anyone knew how the elevator operated without the key.

Some other stories have been told to me recently. One strange occurrence happened in 1994, when Mrs. Cozzens, an art teacher at Bernal, recalled an incident. She stated that in her art classroom a bottle of purple tempera paint in a storeroom closet

exploded for no apparent reason. The explosion blew open the double doors spewing paint across the room and onto the floor. Dozens of other tempera paint bottles in the closed closet were not affected, nor have they ever exploded.

Mrs. Cozzens remembers the facts because the strangeness of the incident. She stated that nobody was allowed inside the private closet. Therefore, it could not have been disturbed by uninvited students without Mrs. Cozzens's knowledge. The keyed lock on the door kept strangers from opening the closet doors without permission. The reason the unexplained exploding paint bottle is mentioned in this story, is the similarity of location. Mrs. Cozzens's art room and the art supply closet are behind the wall of the elevator hallway.



Mrs. Cozzens also assists in teaching music and she points out another interesting and strange occurrence at the Bernal school site. She states that a ceiling light fixture over the stage repeatedly goes on and off during performances. The light does this without warning and is especially noticeable during concerts and other presentations.

The Bernal music teachers are noted for an excellent band performance, but the disturbing flickering light was not part of the act. Often they tried to find out what caused the electrical malfunctioning. They tried to solve it themselves but the lights flickered repeatedly. Cozzens stated that the electricians for the district found nothing to cause this strange flickering to occur.

One fact remains the same; that is the stage's location. It is in front of the elevator and to the left of the hallway.

Perhaps the worst incident that occurred at Bernal was in the fall of 1994. Peg Geringer, a science teacher at Bernal school, stopped me in the local Orchard Supply Hardware store and told me that a homeless person had hanged himself outside her classroom door.

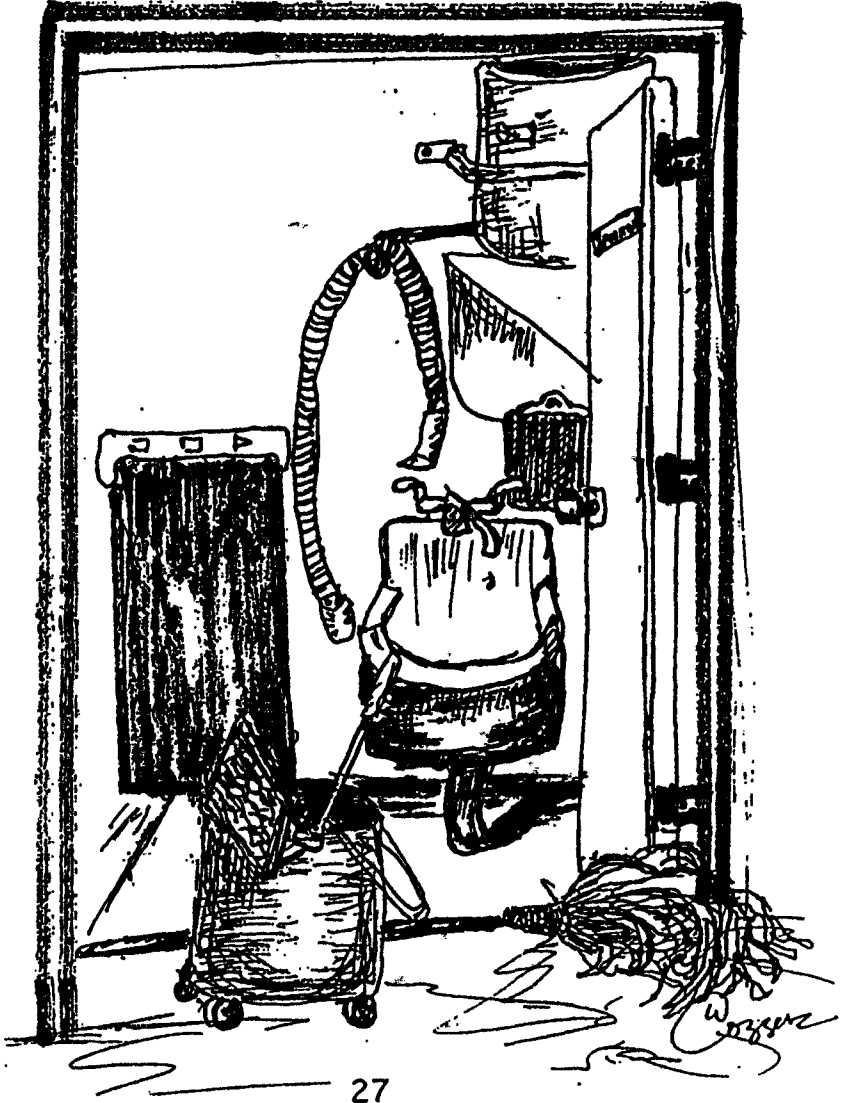


She had just returned to school and the police had placed yellow tape around the area. She explained that he had jumped off the second floor walkway and hanged himself from the outside railing. Her classroom exited into the elevator hallway. A San Jose Police report will back up the incident.

Now, you can be the judge about these strange occurrences. Are these incidents real or do people just imagine them? Are the similarities of occurrences related to an ancient spirit from the Ohlone Indian mound or from the killing days of the Rancho Santa Teresa days? Was Roberto correct in thinking a spirit was haunting the building? I have worked in many school buildings in the Oak Grove School District and the fact is, no other school site has such strange tales told about its building.



# Roberto's Ghost



"The Spirit of Bernal Intermediate School" is a modern living local neighborhood legend. Every young person in the area knows and loves to tell their version of this story to a younger brother, sister or friend. Some teenagers are delighted to hear a good modern ghost story with all the gory details. Others wait with their best friends for a slumber party at home to hear the story told in a darkened, scary room with all the lights turned off.

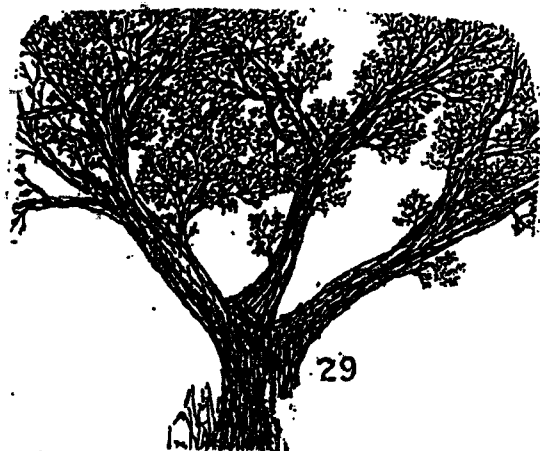
Over the years the story has been added to, altered and changed by creative teenagers trying to impress their intermediate school-age friends. They hope their realistic version will scare their friends. Some young teenagers love to add modern movie gore or other scary events to frighten their younger friends.

Last year, I discovered I was hearing different versions of the Bernal story from various young storytellers. To get to the true version of the legend, I began to search for Roberto, the main person in the story. It occurred to me that none of the student storytellers had ever met the real Roberto or had they heard Roberto's version of the story. They retold all their stories after someone had told them the original tall tale. I then realized the students were not the primary source of the legend.

The old custodians in the school district helped me solve the mystery by telling me that Roberto was still living nearby in the local neighborhood. After a careful search in the San Jose telephone book, I found Roberto's address.

In July of 1995, I found Roberto to be a very healthy, strong and alert individual. Roberto was living in his family's house and land next to Blossom Hill Road in South San Jose. Actually, his home was not very far away from Bernal Intermediate School, where he used to work.

His rural farm home, tucked between the modern shopping centers and freeway of today, still had the appearance of the original orchard farm of years ago. His parents bought the 1945 single-story home in November of 1951. They planted beautiful fruit trees that always yielded a bountiful crop of ripe pears and apricots. The well-kept home was still surrounded by this orchard.



Over time, Roberto's family sold most of the surrounding orchard land and kept about one acre on which to live. Today, Roberto, a retired bachelor, lives in this home with his brother. Together they maintain the small amount of acreage of fruit trees and vegetable gardens still left on his family's property.

When I arrived, I knocked on the door. The retired custodian was at home videotaping "Victory at Sea," a World War II television documentary series. Roberto was very excited and eager to share his tale of the "Spirit of Bernal Intermediate School" with me. To set the record straight, I now retell you the true legend of:

## Roberto's Ghost

*"How do you report seeing a ghost to the police? How do you report seeing a ghost to the police?"*, repeated Roberto when I interviewed him, sitting at his kitchen table.

*"I saw a ghostly image at Bernal Intermediate School around the time that Proposition 13 took place in 1978.*

*"I was vacuuming on the second floor by the north-west corner of Bernal School around 9:00 p.m. when something caught my eye. Down the hall, I saw a beautiful, strangely dressed young Spanish woman. The image stood about ten feet in front of me.*

*"She was a beautiful young woman, in her early twenties with a clear, smooth complexion. She was wearing a long, dark Victorian dress with no sleeves. Although her arms were bare, the young woman wore white silk lace wristbands. Fixed neatly on her head was a bun held in place with a long, black-toothed Spanish comb.*

*"I stopped my vacuuming and tried to go to the image, but she floated past me. I remember looking at her feet. They were not moving normally, but dragging*

smoothly behind her several feet above the floor. The image came from the west and floated past me to the east. As she moved down the hall, she never looked back at me. Then the image slowly disappeared down the second floor hall before she got to the elevator.

"I remember how my body felt. My heart was pounding loud and beating fast. I was shaking like a leaf, so much that the hairs on my arms and head rose up, giving me a chilling, cold feeling all over. I remember my eyes feeling like they were going to pop out of their sockets.

"Looking for help, I went downstairs to the Teachers' Room and locked the door. I called Fred, my supervisor at the District Office, and reported the event. Fred told me to call the San Jose City Police and report what I had seen!

"Nevertheless, how does someone report seeing a ghost to the police? They would never believe me. That night, I never called the police to report the incident; I did not want any problems."

After the interview I showed him the story, "The Spirit of Bernal Intermediate School." Roberto read the tale and said the teenagers had added many colorful details to the story. He said that he had forgotten that he had made any notes or drawings about the ghost, nor does he remember describing the large wart on the end of a spirit's nose.

Roberto said he was not afraid to work at Bernal and it did not bother him to be upstairs at night. He stated his custodian closet was on the second floor and he was always upstairs working. The custodian said he never saw the image of the beautiful, young woman with the dark Victorian dress again.

Roberto continued to work in the District and had retired in the late 1980's. He stated he had worked in many other school buildings in the Oak Grove School District for years and had never seen a ghost in any of them. Also, he remarked that no other ghost sighting had ever happened to him again since he worked at Bernal School.



Roberto's original tale was first told to his entrusted fellow workers and friends. Over time they shared what they heard from him to their friends and those friends retold the tale to others.

I imagine that each of his entrusted friends retold their version of the story, adding their details to the events. Some details were added to make Roberto's story more colorful and believable. The final version told by the children today includes the added colorful versions, different from what Roberto had originally reported.

I believe these young modern storytellers have altered the tale not to cause harm to anyone, but to make contemporary changes. Stories with modernized changes make a tale creditable. If a story is believable, then one has a good neighborhood ghost tale that can be used to initiate new seventh graders.

"The Spirit of Bernal Intermediate School" has survived the unique test of time, even competitively with today's modern videos, games and horror movies. Real events or not, what was it in Roberto's original story that could be believable and true? Did he really see an image?

The first chapter of this book retells the student's version of the story, "The Spirit of Bernal Intermediate School." This is the school's version that I originally heard from Coach Ron Harris. Realizing how much of Roberto's actual story has survived over time is fascinating. It is this continued source of new oral legends that keeps the mystery of the old Bernal Rancho enchanting and alive.

New occurrences of unrelated people, telling of their incidents only adds to the strange circumstances surrounding the old Bernal Rancho area, area that continues to reproduce unbelievable tales that have fascinated humans since prehistoric times. For example, the powerful Muwekma-Ohlone story, The Legend of Santa Teresa Springs, a legend told about a life-saving spirit found in a sacred Indian spring located 1500 yards away from the school, a place enchanted with old and new colorful California legends and life-saving stories.

Was Roberto fortunate to see the reappearance of the Black Robed Woman of Santa Teresa Springs? Was he like the natives of long ago saved by her powers? I know that Roberto knew nothing of the Legend of Santa Teresa Springs. Perhaps in time some modern investigators may be able to solve the mystery of "Roberto's Ghost." Maybe it will be a new seventh grader that will be the one who has the chance to see the image of the Robed Woman again?



# The Indian Baby and The Baby-Sitter



As a referee for the Blossom Valley Soccer Club in 1987, I was fortunate to meet many neighbors around the Bernal Rancho site. During a soccer game at Bernal Intermediate School I met Char Gibson.

She told me of her experiences living next door to the old Bernal Rancho Adobe. Char lives in the middle of the old Bernal Rancho Adobe site. Her wood fence shares the boundary line and the Bear Tree Lot. She remembers when the neighborhood children would chase after the tractors plowing the Bernal adobe field for weed control.

Other people in the neighborhood with whom I have spoken have said their children enjoyed this event as a field day. They and the children would walk the field to collect arrowheads and artifacts that had become exposed after the plowing of the field.

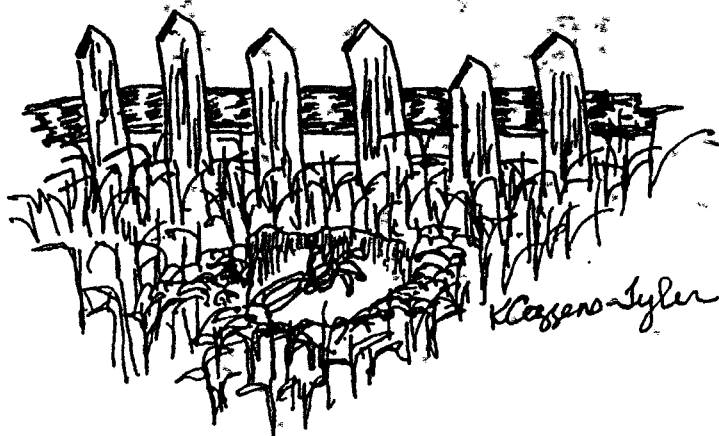
After the game she told me one of my favorite Rancho Santa Teresa stories, a true event that happened to her family about a tiny Ohlone Indian baby's grave.

**"When my husband, Pete, and I first moved into Blossom Valley, we purchased our new tract home next to the open field. Like any new home owner, we set about planting a new lawn and a garden to make our home beautiful.**

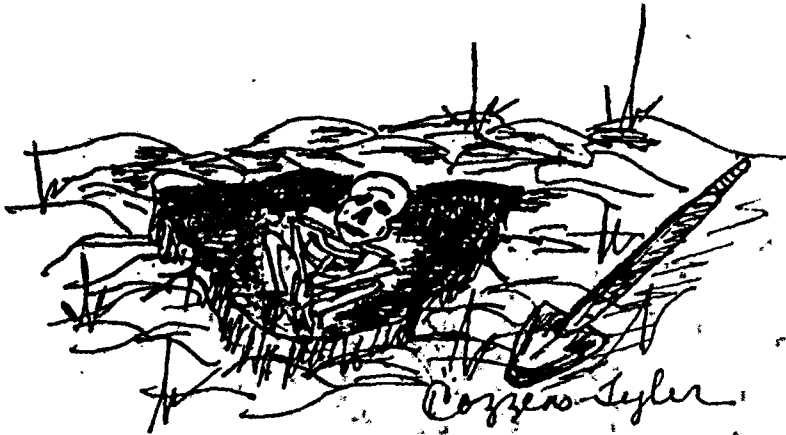
**"We bought several new pine Christmas trees for shade and evergreen shrubs to mark the fence line of our property. We wanted to grow a row of shrubs and trees along the fence to give us shade. While working on the project, I started to dig a hole for the pine tree along the south side fence. When I had dug into the soil about three or four feet, I uncovered an old Indian grave.**

**"As we dug out the shallow grave, I saw a tiny white skeleton lying curled up in the soil. We all were surprised and wondered what kind of animal was being uncovered.**

*"I watched as all of its tiny bone-white ribs slowly became exposed to the bright sunlight possibly for the first time in centuries. We carefully dug around the grave, trying not to break the tiny bones. I noticed clumps of dry, brown adobe dirt still clinging to each bone fragment, preventing the skeleton's freedom from the earth."*



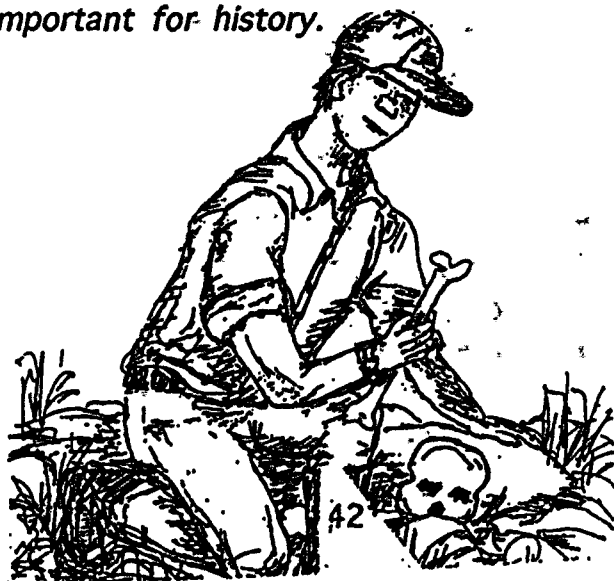
*"The tiny skull appeared through the dirt attached to the neck of the skeleton. Through each eye socket we could see the backside of the skull's head. Holding the legs of the skeleton together were two tiny arm limbs. I could see each of the tiny arm bones reaching down, its small fingers trying to clench the other hand to bond everything tightly together.*





*"Making further inspections, we decided we had uncovered a small Indian baby's grave in our backyard. The discovery of the skeleton was a surprise to us. It was the first grave uncovered in the area since the subdivision was developed. No one had told us we lived next to an Indian burial ground or, for that fact, that our home was on top of one.*

*"We carefully removed the skeleton of the body from the grave. I wrapped the bones meticulously in a newspaper, making sure not one of them would become broken. We knew someday the skeleton would be important for history.*

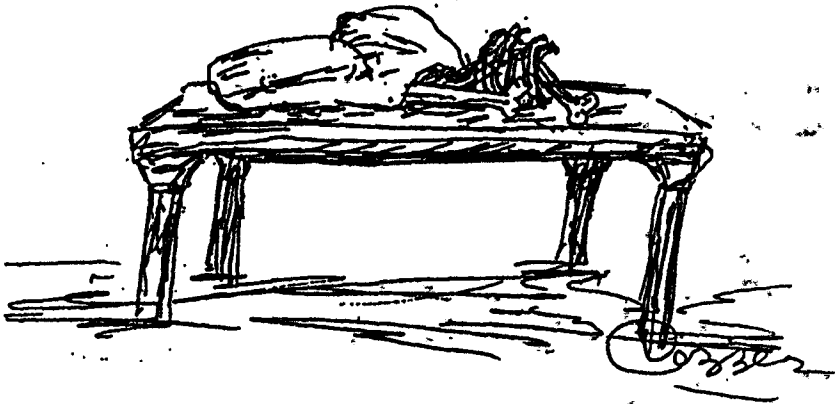


*"Pete wanted to bury the baby's remains. We decided to keep the bones to bury them later with proper Indian respect. Pete wanted to follow the tradition of his Native American ancestors.*

*"I wanted to keep the skeleton remains safe, so I placed all the white bones into a small brown paper lunch bag and stored the bag on a shelf on my back porch.*

*"Several days later, we needed to leave our home and go shopping at Eastridge. I wanted my daughter to be baby-sat. The baby-sitter I used was in the ninth grade at Santa Teresa High School and she was very responsible. She saw the grave site and overheard us talking about the skeleton of the baby Indian. She was very interested in the grave and wanted to see the bag of bones. She said that her class was studying ancient world civilizations and she thought it would be fantastic if her class could see the bones.*

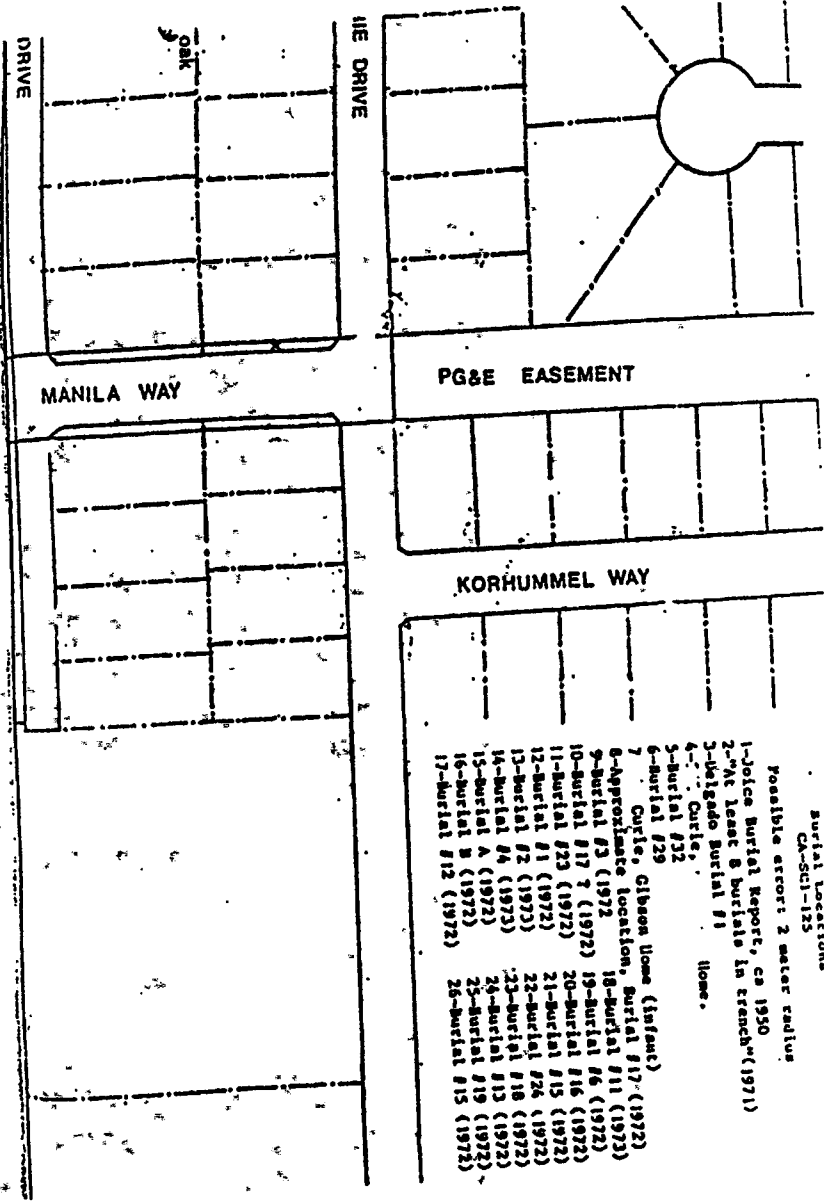
*"We left to go shopping and I gave her all the instructions on how to take care of my three-year-old daughter. We enjoyed shopping and returned home. The baby-sitter did not have any problems with watching my child. When I was paying her for her work, she asked if she could take the paper bag with the Indian bones to school."*



*"She wanted to add some realism to the report she was doing on ancient Indians. She thought bringing the bones to class would help her earn an "A" grade. Knowing how very responsible she was, I agreed to let her take the bag to school the next day.*

*"Early the next morning I got the old paper bag with the skeleton bones down from the closet. I felt it was important to help make the school theme realistic and gave the bag to the baby-sitter to take to school.*

*"At school, when it was time for her report, she took the brown paper bag from under her desk and opened it to show the children the bones of the baby Indian. During her presentation, she decided to pass the bag around to each child to inspect the baby's remains themselves.*



"The students all looked excitedly into the bag with the small skeleton of bones and gave their squeamish yells and impressions. After she finished the lesson, she returned the bones to the bag.

"Later at home, the baby-sitter placed the bag of bones on the kitchen counter. Her mother told her to put the bag outside.

"She found a place outside where the bones were in a safe location, away from all her little brothers and sisters. Feeling the baby's bones were safe, she left with her friends to eat a hamburger and French fries lunch at McDonald's on Snell.

"Unknown to her, while she was at Mc Donald's, her parents came out of their house to clean up the outside yard and the patio area. They wanted to do the cleaning before it was time to fix dinner and before it was too dark.

*"When the baby-sitter returned home from lunch she saw the house back in a well-kept order. She saw the kitchen counter cleared of clutter, the yard free of weeds and the bag of bones gone. When she asked her mother for the bag of bones, her mother replied,*

*"Oh, you mean that old bag of bones? I always toss old chicken bones into the garbage."*

They searched their backyard again, but her parents knew they had thrown the bag of bones in the trash, not realizing the importance of the contents. That day the city had come by with its garbage trucks and taken the trash to the dumps before the baby-sitter had returned.

Char and Pete were shocked to hear what had happened to the remains of the skeleton. They could not rebury the Indian baby's skeleton in a proper manner as they originally intended. Pete, being of Native American ancestry, was very concerned about the loss. He wanted to place the skeleton back in the earth in its original resting place. Today we are still very concerned about disturbing Native American grave sites in the area.

Some close neighbors have said the Indian baby's spirit is not at rest and still haunts the neighborhood to find in its original grave site.

The Gibson's discovery was the earliest recorded grave in the area. Their find helped identify the importance of the Bernal site as an early pre-history California archeological Ohlone Indian cemetery. Later, when the archaeologists investigated the area, they identified about twenty-four other grave sites around the Rancho Santa Teresa neighborhood.

In 1992, I asked Charlotte to retell the story to me. She only told of uncovering the grave in her yard and not what had happened to the bones. The archeological records show the grave site and label it as the "Gibson Baby" on their maps. The records note the site of the grave with the body missing, even though Char says, "The archaeologists did not contact us about this grave or what happened to the bones."







# The Indian Chief's Image



In the spring of 1993, the Oak Grove School District hired me as a history instructor to teach a class about the old Spanish Bernal Rancho era in the early 1800's. One Tuesday afternoon, while I was walking out of the classroom doors at Bernal Intermediate School, I saw a woman rush to the doors and heard her scream at the top of her lungs.

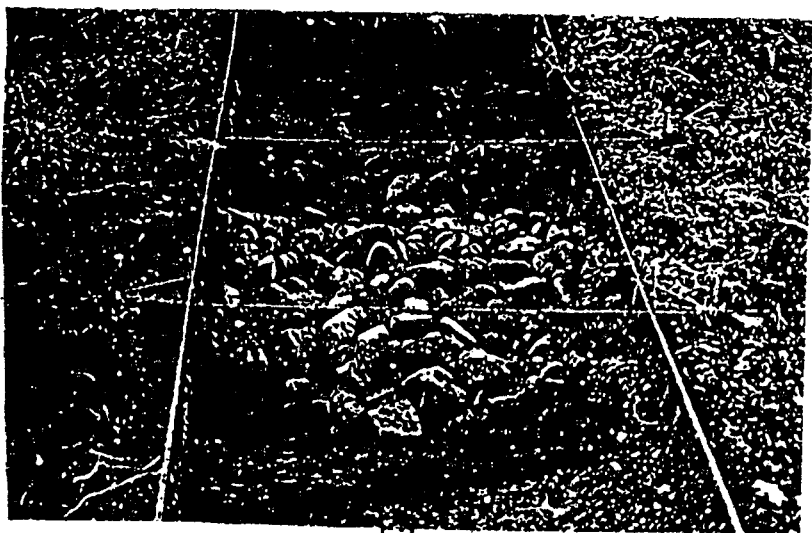
*"Mike, we need to talk! I have to tell you another story that happened to me."* It was Charel Mohler. She was excited and eager to share a supernatural experience that happened to her years ago.

Now this was not the most opportune time for me. I was leading a group of active gifted students out of school and had no time to stop and talk. With me I had thirty hyped-up students who wanted to see the mysterious image of the Robed Woman at Santa Teresa Springs. None of these students had the temperament to let me stop and chat with Charel, so I knew I would have to hear her story later.

Charel worked at Bernal School and was always eager to help any student immediately. I first met Charel at San Anselmo Elementary School. She was a trusted parent who was very responsible and intelligent. She worked well with the children and I knew her information had to be important.

I knew Charel would not have yelled at me if she did not have a strange and interesting story to tell. She lived across the street from the Bear Tree Lot and was a good friend of Char Gibson. Both Charel and Char live on Curie Drive next to the ancient Ohlone Indian burial ground and earthen mound.

A mound is a term used to describe an artificial bank or hill of earth. Archeologists use this term for an area of land where the ground level had built up into a small earthen berm that prehistoric people (Muwekma-Ohlone Indians) have inhabited or buried their dead in for many years. The 1972 archeologist's investigation at the site found evidence of a five to seven foot mound hill created at the site. This mound was made from thousands of years of ceremonial food preparation material and mortuary offerings placed on the ground by ancient Ohlone Indians.



At the Curie street mound, archaeologist Alan Leventhal claimed that the site was used to precontact Ohlone Indians for religious reasons. He said the site was regarded as a highly spiritual site for the ancestral Muwekma Ohlone people. The archaeological evidence from the salvage excavations showed signs that the ancient tribe had held religious ceremonies by burying their dead there for thousands of years. He stated that perhaps two hundred Indians may have prayed on the site at one time during a funeral or a "Cry" ceremony.

My friend, Charel, lived in her home when James Delgado and other archaeologists from the city came in 1972 to investigate and study the Bernal Rancho site. They found and recorded the remains of twenty-four prehistoric graves across the street or near her home. *"My neighbor, Char, was one of the first residents in the neighborhood to uncover an Indian grave. She uncovered a baby Indian's body in her backyard,"* Charel stated.

At night, after the archaeologists would leave the dig site, Charel and her young family would go over and look into the newly dug holes. She would inspect the work that had been done. Her family was so interested in the dig site that she took pictures of the uncovered artifacts and added the photos to her family collection.

Charel gave me pictures from the original 1972 archaeological dig of the old Bernal adobe house foundation that the archaeologist had uncovered. Later when I called her at home, she added more information about the old adobe home that had burned down and gave me a new story to include in my collection of "spirit" stories.



**"It was a shame that old house caught fire,"** she said. **"The old home had character. It was a two-story wood-framed structure built around one of the first old adobe homes. The old mud adobe home was one of the original houses built in the 1820's by the Bernals during their rancho days in the Blossom Valley area. We felt the structure was so historically important to save that we organized a group of neighbors to go to the city council to have the old adobe building restored."**

Over the years the adobe owners had added new rooms. The new construction created a problem in getting renovation money to help reconstruction because the structure could not be saved or funded by any federal historical grants.

According to federal grant regulations and qualifications, historical structures need be in an original state. They must not have any modern changes or additions to qualify to be identified as a historical landmark. Without identification as a historic landmark, the owners could not receive funding to restore the adobe buildings. Therefore, like the other great adobe buildings in the state, the last owners allowed the last Bernal adobe structure to weather and deteriorate.

As the property fell into disrepair, pressure came from contractors and developers for a prime building site. Many of the neighbors felt the owner could earn more money by redeveloping. Redeveloping meant clearing the land of old buildings by destroying the old adobe and selling off a vacant lot to the developers.

In the early 1970's, the computer age brought on a real estate boom to the City of San Jose. Many landowners felt that if the City bought and preserved their property for historical reasons, landowners would not receive the high inflated dollar value for their property. Owners would speculate how they would have higher appreciation in land value if they could sell the land to a private home developer and not the City. With the adobe on the land, the property became a liability to the property owners.

Some private developers did not feel it was an advantage to have a historic adobe on their subdivision property. Builders felt they would run into problems with the City's historical preservationists, who may want to save a part of the land for public use, thus taking away part of the project for a park. Many developers thought the solution to the landlord's problem was to have the land cleared of buildings. People in the neighborhood always speculated that the fire at the adobe was not an accident.



Life at the adobe was also a concern to others in the neighborhood. A long-time resident in the area and teacher, Mrs. Barbara described the life-style at the old adobe as rather scary.

Mrs. Barbara said, *"My young sons used to play outside with the boys who lived in the adobe house. It was a place that many of the neighbors kept their kids from entering."* She described the people who rented the place as *"hippies"* and considered the area not the safest for young children to play. It was a place you did not want your kids to be around because you were afraid they would be influenced by the wrong crowd or perhaps get hurt.

She told of entering the old adobe home to pick up her small children. The living room had several large, massive redwood beams giving support to the floor and the structure. Also, inside was a downstairs cellar or basement.

Mrs. Barbara remembered the rooms as being very small. She also recalled the night the adobe burned to the ground. She stated that she had heard the neighbors speculate they thought the fire was set intentionally.

Charel said that the day after the old adobe house burned to the ground, she was standing with Char Gibson. They began to talk about the events at the Bernal lot that took place over the years. They discussed how the ranchers, neighbors, archaeologists, P.G.&E. workers, and the builders dug up some graves in the field where the adobe once stood.

Perhaps a frightening thought may have overcome Char and Charel after they realized what they actually eye-witnessed over the years. What strange unexplained occurrence could now happen after the archaeologists and students studied and disturbed the ancient burial site?

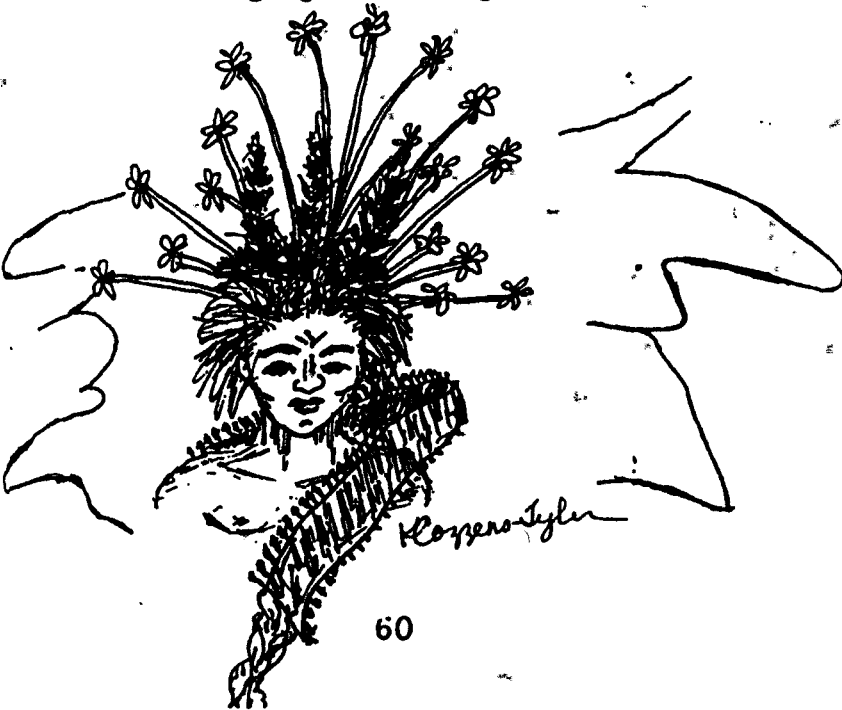
Could it be a place where archaeologists, in a day's work, had agitated the sacred grounds and the spirits of an undisturbed 3000-year-old ancient tribe's burial ground? Could these modern men have awakened buried spirits by moving the prehistoric remains from their final resting place?

Charel told of another neighborhood rumor that a strange burial site was uncovered at the lot. The grave had a body that was different from the other bodies uncovered in the area. It was a body that was uniquely dressed. The individual was buried with a helmet covering its head. The body had a shield

covering it, like a suit of armor or a shawl. The covering came down beyond the knees straight over the back. Some people said that the archaeologists thought the body was that of a warrior or high Indian chief.

What was strange or supernatural about Charel's story is not so much about the grave sites or the dig site, but what she told me. Charel explained how the archeological dig had affected her friend Char.

The mysterious, unexplained story she wanted to tell me was about an image Char's family saw in their home. Charel explained that Char told her she once saw a large ghost-like figure in her kitchen.



Char said that while she was cooking at her electric stove, her husband first sat down at the kitchen table in his favorite eating spot and saw an Indian figure floating over his head. When Char turned around to serve her husband his dinner, she was shocked to see the image of a large face of a strong Indian. The supernatural chief was standing behind her husband, Pete.

Char did not know the reason the image appeared but she told Charel Mohler she definitely saw the image. Charel Mohler said, "Being a good friend, I knew when Char was serious. Char and I are often confidential with each other, so I know she really thought she saw some kind of real image."

Mrs. Mohler said that the reason Char thought the image might have been there was because Pete and Char found and uncovered a baby Indian buried in their front yard.

Perhaps Char's imagination got the best of her that night; or, perhaps, was it the spirit of the ancient chief trying to communicate with her? Charel Mohler knows her best friend really saw something above her husband that night.

When I interviewed Char in August of 1995, she said, "This was a real event. Mike, what I saw was not a Whopper! We all saw it from the couch in the living room. We had three or four friends over that night and Pete and I really saw the image. In fact, we all saw it in the kitchen. Pete saw the image first."

Again, the area around the ancient burial ground gives us an unexplained mysterious story or legend. Is it possible ancient people living on the site discovered a mystical spiritual power at the springs? Could this religious site for thousands of years continue to give off today a spirit of ancestral people trying to reach out to awaken the senses of the modern person? Tomorrow will others who live in the area see or feel its powerful spirit? Will some other disbelievers consider it a joke?

You can be the judge yourself. Walk the lot at 455 Bernal Road to see if you can feel within your body the prehistoric spirit that may protect or haunt this ancient burial ground. Today, you may look around the site for the hidden stories of the past and then perhaps you, too, may discover an unrecorded "Whopper", yourself.



# Acknowledgment

Artistic credit goes to a naturally talented artist, Katy Cozzens-Tyler. Her artistic talent brings alive the vivid colorful images of the spirits found in the stories. I acknowledge her delightful detailed drawings that took enormous amounts of time sketching.

Dorene, my loving spouse, who deserves credit for encouraging me and helping edit these colorful stories.

Also, Virginia Miller, I acknowledge the many hours she spent helping me edit the stories. Without her help, the stories you have read would not be as clearly written and understood.

Special recognition needs to be given to James Delgado and Alan Leventhal for their efforts to record the ancient civilization of our neighborhood. Their dedicated professional information and editing gave me the background for my research.

Credit needs to be mentioned to all my friends who shared their neighborly tales. Charel Mohler, Pete and Char Gibson, Katy Cozzens-Tyler, Manny Barbara, Gary Francis, Marcos Zararripa, Peg Geringer, Mrs. Barb R., Ron Harris and the other neighbors who trusted their enchanting stories with me. I could not have gathered a collection of their true realistic stories without their trusting help.

Acknowledgment belongs to the children in all my classes who helped share their stories from their neighborhood. Without their inquisitive questions, drawings, stories and interest I would not have paid any attention to the site.

Recognition is given to the Muwekma-Ohloné Indians, the first inhabitants of the site and their oral legends.

# Oral History Resources

During the last several years I have been fortunate to uncover some exciting and colorful legends of the area. Research in the San Jose Library's California Room and neighborly eyewitnesses are the source and validation to these exciting tales about the area.

## The Spirit of Bernal Junior High School

Ron Harris

Gary Francis

Manny Barbara

## The Elevator

Marcos Zamarripa

Peg Geringer

Katy Cozzens-Tyler

## Roberto's Ghost

Roberto Ruiz

## The Indian Baby and the Baby-Sitter

Char Gibson

Pete Gibson

## The Indian Chief's Image

Charel Mohler

Pete Gibson

Char Gibson

Mrs. Barbara

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Santa Teresa Park Master Plan-Environmental  
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Clara Department of Parks and Recreation

West Valley College Archaeological Survey -  
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Bernal-Joice Ranch Tour-Rancho Santa Teresa

August 29, 1992; Paul Bernal and Preservation  
Action Council of San Jose





Whoppers and Ghostly Tales from Rancho Santa Teresa expand on the old tradition of telling a good tale. These colorful and vivid tales are written and recorded from the actual living sources in the tradition of passing a legend to a friend. These stories capture the oral history of our modern times. Many are retold by today's neighbors and educators who truly lived and worked in the area.

Charmed by the background of the ancient burial grounds and the early Bernal Spanish settlement, the stories try to explain the "Spirit" happenings to its modern day audience. The stories are a collection of tales from the same area, all rewritten and recorded from their original sources. All were told to the author without the knowledge of the other happenings. These legends continue to add to the hundreds of stories that exist around the famous Santa Teresa Springs since the beginning of early human beings.

Individually these stories are fun to read, but collectively they will capture your speculative imagination as you try to understand why early people hold Santa Teresa Springs as a sacred place.

All the stories have survived in the neighborhood as an enchanting tale even with competition from modern movies and computer animation. This is a fun book for children to read about San Jose's local history.